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### **SOFIA STUDENTS' TEMPERANCE SOCIETY – ESTABLISHMENT AND ACTIVITY IN RELATION WITH THE REDUCTION OF POPULATION MORTALITY IN BULGARIA (1922-1939)**

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**Abstract:** This article introduces the Sofia Students' Temperance Society (STS) in the context of the struggle for reduction of the mortality of the Bulgarian population in the years between the two world wars. In this connection the ideas, organization and popularity of the STS are being investigated, as well as its impact on the reduction of the mortality of the population in the country. The research is based predominantly on information taken out of memories the STS activists, from materials of the society itself as well as on data collected in the archives of the Ministry of Interior.

**Keywords:** Students, Temperance movement, Mortality, Alcoholism, Bulgaria 1918-1939.

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The first two decades of the 20th c. are the period when particularly high mortality rates among Bulgaria's population were detected (table 1).

**Table 1**  
Crude birth rate and crude death rate in Bulgaria (1900-1920)

Year	Crude birth rate (per 1000)	Crude death rate (per 1000)
1900	42,3	22,6
1901	37,5	23,1
1902	38,8	23,8
1903	41,0	22,7
1904	42,4	21,2
1905	43,5	21,8
1906	44,0	22,3
1907	43,6	22,3
1908	40,5	24,3
1909	40,6	26,6
1910	41,7	23,2
1911	40,2	21,5
1912	40,7	20,6
1913	25,7	29,0
1914	45,1	20,7
1915	40,2	20,0
1916	21,3	20,8
1917	17,2	21,2
1918	21,2	32,0
1919	32,8	20,2
1920	39,9	21,4

Despite the fact that a major reason for that were the consequences of the wars Bulgaria was involved in, that process experienced certain impacts from a number of unhealthy habits such as alcohol abuse, tobacco smoking, etc. Those additional factors identified upon the end of World War One were countered by an active campaign launched in the country as an effort designed to reduce population's mortality rate. The establishment and promotion of Capital city's Students' Temperance Society (STS) was part of that social movement. Its history remains almost a green-field save some sporadic references in research efforts dedicated to the Bulgarian General Students' Union (Michev and Kolev, 1960: 135 -136, Todorova 1988: 104) This report's goal is to introduce the Sofia Students' Temperance Society in the

context of the efforts designed to reduce the Bulgaria's population mortality rate in the years between the WWI and WWII. In this context the objectives set in the narrative are as follows:

- To study the ideas and to identify to what extent STS's specific lines of activity based on those ideas have been a success in the process of overcoming the high levels of mortality among Bulgaria's population.
- To study the STS's levels of organisation and popularity, and the extent to which such organisation and popularity has contributed to the active effort to reduce population's mortality rate in the country.

This study is primarily based on some information retrieved from memories shared by STS activists, from league's papers and from data collected from the archive of the Ministry of Interior.

The chronological framework of this study is conditional on the years indicating the emerging and termination of STS's existence.

The Students' Temperance Society emerged in 1922 however its emergence was anticipated by a number of other manifestations of the temperance movement in Bulgaria.

The very first rudiments thereof may be associated with the activity of some American evangelist missionaries. Two of them made an attempt to establish a "temperance team" in the town of Samokov as early as in 1879. Those "first sparks of sobriety" in Bulgaria failed to gain ground of popularity and faded away with no significant success (Nauchen sbornik, 1937 (Scientific Compendium): 9). The very notion of an "abstainer" prior to the period of the Balkan wars used to be only a synonym of a protestant. Moreover, "*In those times, it used to be incomprehensible how a completely healthy person could be an abstainer, unless they were an evangelist*" (Nauchensbornik, 1937 (Scientific Compendium): 10)

Beyond the activity of the evangelist missionaries, the first Bulgarian "pioneer" of the Temperance movement was a teacher named Hristo Dimchev. His memories contain a narration on how in 1905 the first "school students' Temperance team" was established and that was in the village of Golyamo Malovo, the municipality of Tsaribrod (today's Dimitrovgrad, Serbia, translator's note). Hristo Dimchev wrote:

*"In 1905, I was a teacher in the village of Golyamo Malovo, the municipality of Tsaribrod. Back then I was young, I was an idealist and I was full of those golden dreams, I was enthusiastic and burning in my desire to be useful to my nation, to do my bit for my nation's liberation from its superstitions and ignorance, which dimmed its eyes and undermined its eagerness to live to some better days. Golyamo Malovo shocked me with its horrible penury and alcoholism, which was strangling the whole of its population, I would often ask myself: is it penury that gives rise to alcoholism or is it alcoholism that gives rise to penury? It looks as if there is an invariable connection making people's suffering go stronger. After long doubts and quest, I firmly decided that fight against alcoholism must start: brave, relentless and ruthless. A source of courage for me were Dr. Clarke's anti-alcohol brochures and a fly-sheet issued by a school inspector whose name I fail to remember now"* (Nauchen sbornik 1937: 9)